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by OLIVER HERFORD

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The Mythological Zoo

The Mythological Zoo

By
Oliver Herford



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1912

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To
Elwyn Barron
With Affectionate Regard

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The Mythological Zoo

Medusa

How did Medusa do her hair?
The question fills me with despair.
It must have caused her sore distress
That head of curling snakes to dress.
Whenever after endless toil
She coaxed it finally to coil,
The music of a Passing Band
Would cause each separate hair to stand
On end and sway and writhe and spit,—
She couldn't "do a thing with it."
And, being woman and aware
Of such disaster to her hair,
What *could* she do but petrify
All whom she met, with freezing eye?



The Siren

The Siren may be said to be
The Chorus-Lady of the Sea;
Tho' Mermaids claim her as their kin,
Instead of fishy tail and fin
Two shapely feet rejoice the view
(With all that appertains thereto).
When to these other charms we add
A voice that drives the hearer mad,
Who will dispute her claim to be
The Chorus-Lady of the Sea?



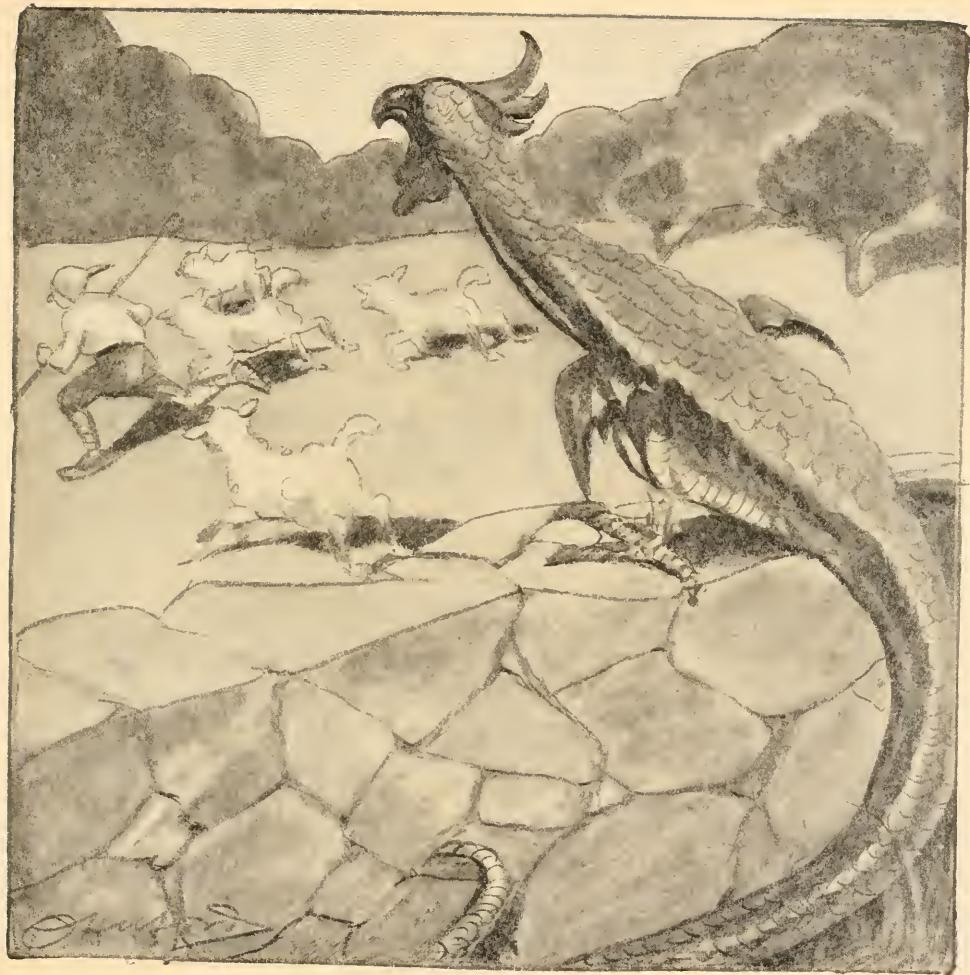
The Dolphin

The Dolphin was, if you should wish
To call him so,—the King of Fish.
Though having neither gills nor scales,
His title *should be* Prince of Whales.
While too small waisted to provide
A Jonah with a Berth Inside,
The Dolphin has been known to pack
A Drowning Sailor on his back
And bear him safely into port,—
He was a Taxi-whale, in short.



The Cockatrice

If you will listen to advice
You will avoid the Cockatrice—
A caution I need hardly say
Wholly superfluous to-day.
Yet had you lived when they were rife
Such warning might have saved your life.
To meet the Cockatrice's eye
Means certain death — and that is why
When I its features here portray
I make it look the other way.
O Cockatrice! were you so mean
What must the *Henatrice* have been!



Cerberus

Dear Reader, should you chance to go
To Hades, do not fail to throw
A “Sop to Cerberus” at the gate,
His anger to propitiate.
Don’t say “Good dog!” and hope thereby
His three fierce Heads to pacify.
What though he try to be polite
And wag his Tail with all his might,
How shall one amiable Tail
Against three angry Heads prevail?
The Heads *must* win.—What puzzles me
Is why in Hades there should be
A Watch dog; ’tis, I should surmise,
The *last* place one would burglarize.



The Sphinx

She was half Lady and half cat—
What is so wonderful in that?
Half of our lady friends (so say
The other half) are *Cats* to-day.
In Egypt she made quite a stir,
They carved huge Images of her.
Riddles she asked of all she met
And all who answered wrong, she ate.
When OEdipus her riddle solved
The minx — I mean the Sphinx—dissolved
In tears.—What is there, when one thinks,
So wonderful about the Sphinx?



The Sea Serpent

O wondrous worm that won the Height
Of Fame by keeping out of sight!
Never was known on Land or Sea
Such a Colossal Modesty;
Never such arrogant pretence
Of Ostentatious Diffidence.
Celebrity whom none has seen,
Save some Post Prandial Marine,
No magazine can reproduce
Your Photograph.— Oh, what's the use
Of doing things when one may be
So Famous a Nonentity!



Chas. S.

The Salamander

The Salamander made his bed
Among the glowing embers red.
A Fiery Furnace, to his mind,
Hygiene and Luxury combined.
He was, if I may put it so,
A Saurian Abednigo.
He loved to climb with nimble ease
The branches of the Gas-log Trees
Where oft on chilly winter nights
He rose to dizzy Fahrenheits.
Believers in Soul Transmigration
See in him the Re-incarnation
Of those Sad Plagues of summer, who
Ask, "Is it hot enough for you?"



The Jinn

To call a Jinn the only thing
One needed was a magic ring.
You rubbed the ring and forth there came
A monster born of smoke and flame,
A thing of Vapor, Fume and Glare
Ready to waft you anywhere.
The magic Jinns of yesterday
The wand of Science now obey.
You ring, and lo! with rush and roar
The panting monster's at the door,
A thing of Vapor, Fume and Glare
Ready to take you anywhere.
What's in a name? What choice between
The Giants, Jinn and Gasolene?



The Mermaid

Although a Fishwife in a sense,
She does not barter Fish for Pence.
Fisher of Men, her Golden Nets
For foolish Sailormen she sets.
All day she combs her hair and longs
For Dimpled Feet and Curling-tongs.
All night she dreams in ocean caves
Of Low tide Shoes and Marcel Waves.
And while the Fishwife, making sales,
May sell her wares upon her scales,
The Mermaid, wonderful to tell,
Must wear her scales upon hersel'.



Endorse

The Unicorn

The Unicorn 's a first-rate sort.
He helps the Lion to support
The royal arms of England's King
And keep the Throne from tottering.
I wonder what the King would do
If his supporters all withdrew?
Perhaps he 'd try the Stage; a Throne
Should be an easy stepping-stone
To histrionic Heights, and who
Knows till he tries what he can do?
The King, with diligence and care,
Might rise to be a Manager.



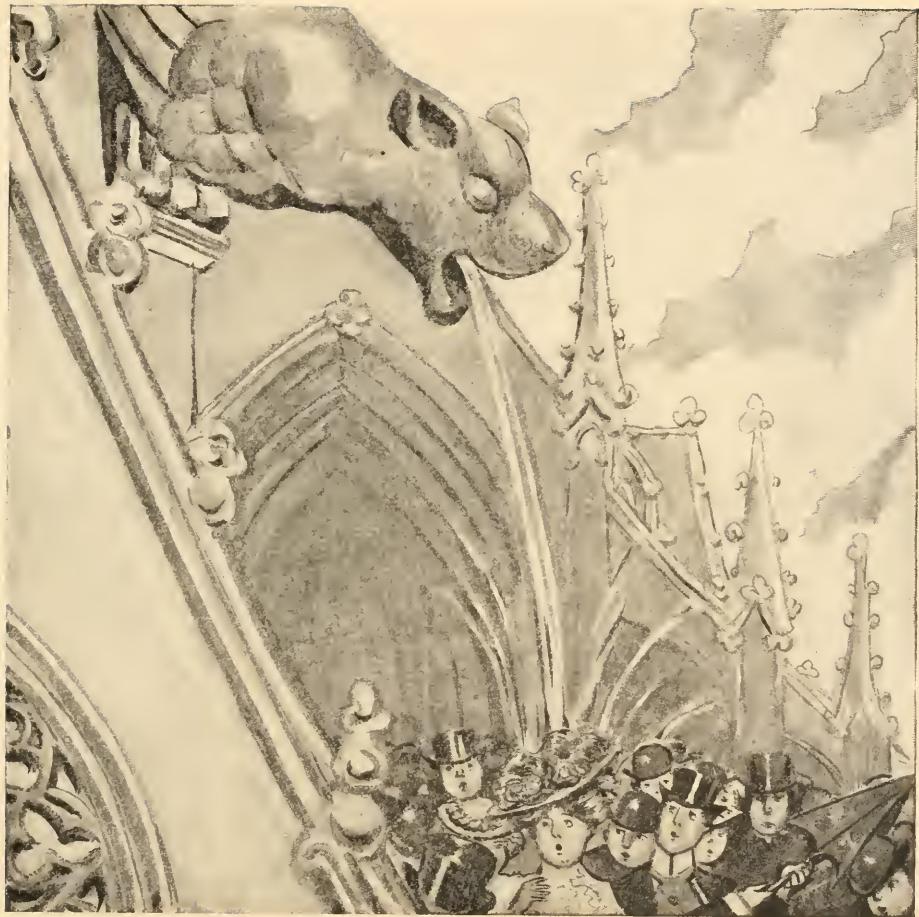
The Satyr

The Satyr lived in times remote,
A shape half-human and half-goat,
Who, having all Man's faults combined
With a Goat's nature unrefined,
Was not what you would call a bright
Example or a shining light.
Far be it from me to condone
The Satyr's sins, yet I must own
I like to think there were a few
Young Satyrs who to Heaven flew,
And when Saint Peter, thunder browed,
Seeing them, cried, "No goats allowed!"
Although the gate slammed quickly to,
Somehow their human halves got through;
Whereat the kindly saint relented,
And that 's how Cherubs were invented.



The Gargoyle

The Gargoyle often makes its perch
On a cathedral or a church,
Where, mid ecclesiastic style,
It smiles an early-Gothic smile.
And while the parson, dignified,
Spouts at his weary flock inside,
The Gargoyle, from its lofty seat,
Spouts at the people in the street,
And, like the parson, seems to say
To those beneath him, “Let us spray.”
I like the Gargoyle best; it plays
So cheerfully on rainy days,
While parsons (no one can deny)
Are awful dampers—when they’re dry.



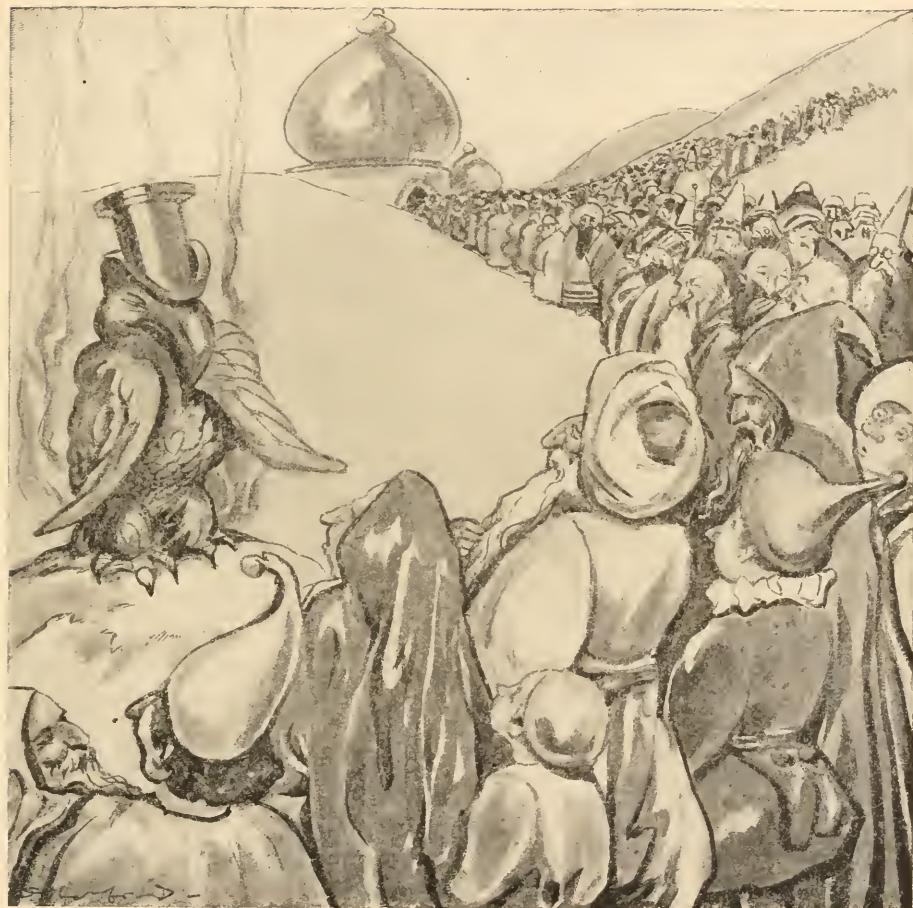
The Chimera

You 'd think a lion or a snake
Were quite enough one's nerves to shake;
But in this classic beast we find
A lion and a snake combined,
And, just as if that were n't enough,
A goat thrown in to make it tough.
Let scientists the breed pooh! pooh!
Come with me to some Social Zoo
And hear the bearded Lion bleat
Goat-like on patent-kidded feet,
Whose "Civil leer and damning praise"
The serpent's cloven tongue betrays.
Lo! lion, goat, and snake combined!
Thus Nature doth repeat her kind.



The Phoenix

The Phœnix was, as you might say,
The burning question of his day:
The more he burned, the more he grew
Splendiferous in feathers new.
And from his ashes rising bland,
Did business at the same old stand.
But though good people went about
And talked, they could not put him out.
A wond'rous bird—indeed, they say
He is not quite extinct to-day.



The Gryphon

It chanced that Allah, looking round,
When he had made his creatures, found
Half of an Eagle and a pair
Of extra Lion legs to spare.
So, hating waste, he took some glue
And made a Gryphon of the two.
But when his handiwork he eyed,
He frowned — and it was petrified,
Doomed for all time to represent
Impatience on a monument.
Sometimes upon our path to-day
Its living counterpart will stray —
Columbia's Eagle strutting in
An awf'ly English Lion's skin,
With glass in eye and swagg'ring gait:
Behold the Gryphon up to date.



The Harpy

They certainly contrived to raise
Queer ladies in the olden days.
Either the type had not been fixed,
Or else Zoölogy got mixed.
I envy not primeval man
This female on the feathered plan.
We only have, I'm glad to say,
Two kinds of human bird to-day —
Women and warriors, who still
Wear feathers when dressed up to kill.



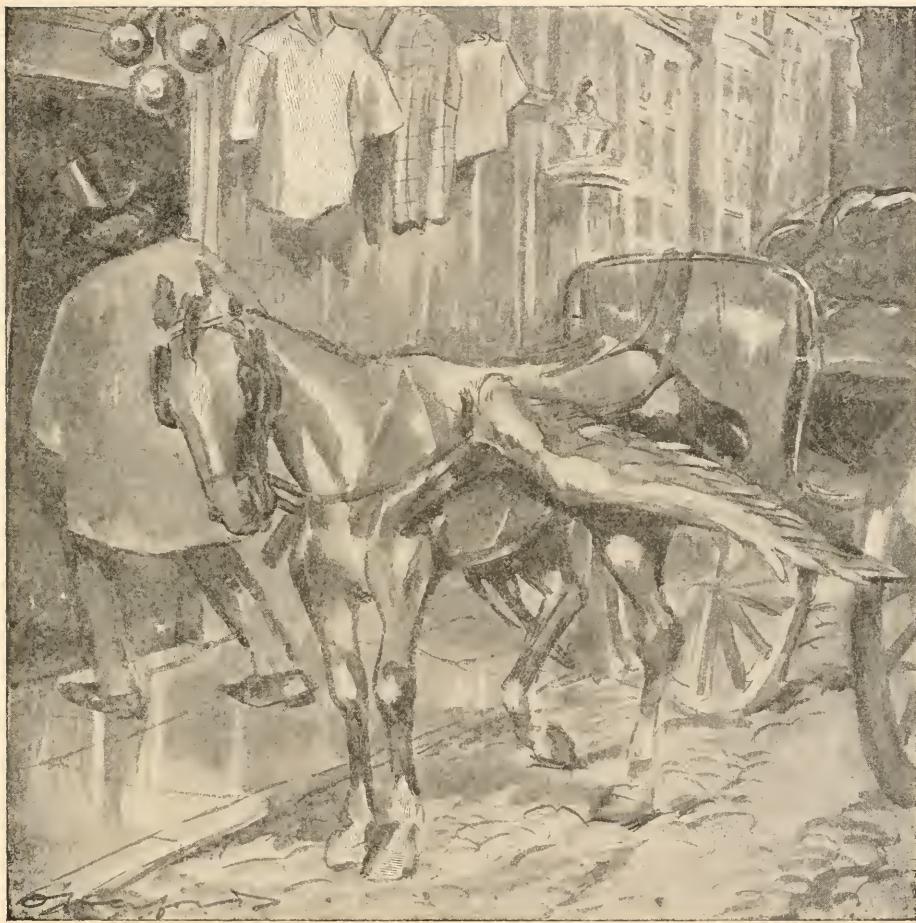
The Centaur

The Centaur led a double life:
Two natures in perpetual strife
He had, that never could agree
On what the bill-of-fare should be;
For when the man-half set his heart
On taking dinner *à la carte*,
The horse was sure to cast his vote
Unswervingly for *table d'OAT*.
A pretty sort of life to lead;
The horse in time went off his feed,
The hungry man was nigh demented,
When one day — OATMEAL was invented!



Pegasus

The ancients made no end of fuss
About a horse named Pegasus,
A famous flyer of his time,
Who often soared to heights sublime,
When backed by some poetic chap
For the Parnassus Handicap.
Alas for fame! The other day
I saw an ancient “one-hoss shay”
Stop at the Mont de Piété,
And, lo! alighting from the same,
A bard, whom I forbear to name.
Noting the poor beast’s rusty hide
(The horse, I mean), methought I spied
What once were wings. Incredulous,
I cried, “Can *this* be Pegasus!”



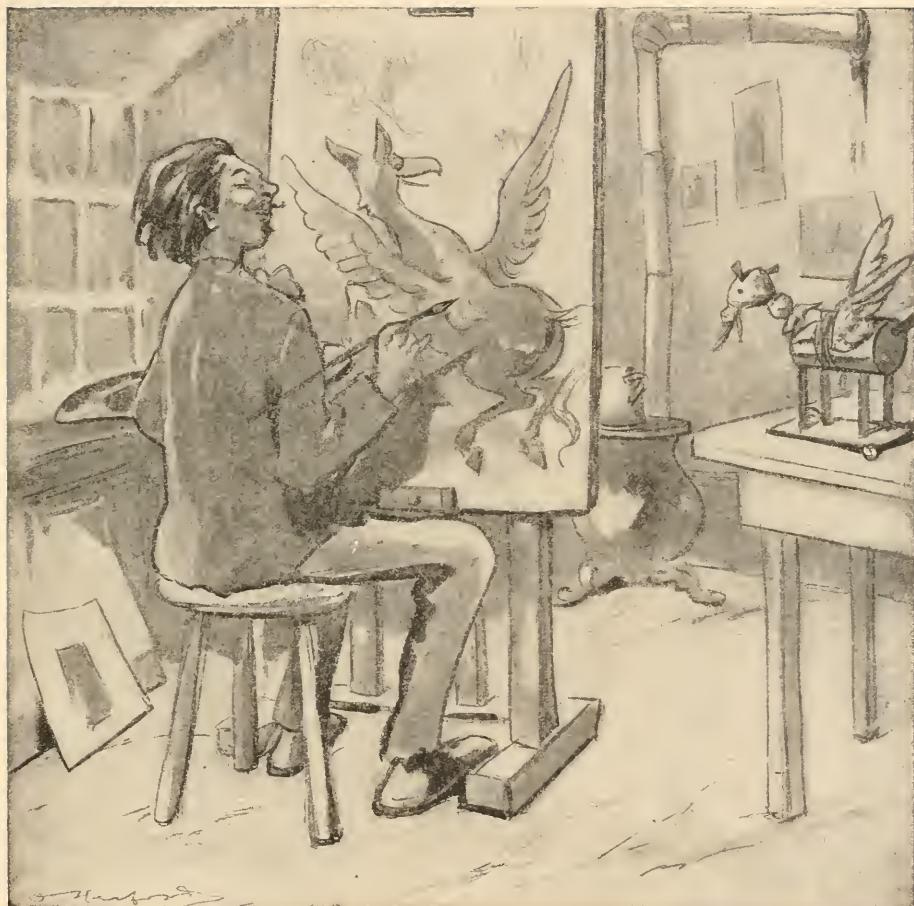
The Hydra

The Hydra Hercules defied,
Its nine diminished heads must hide
Before the baneful modern beast
Who has a thousand heads at least.
See how in horrid tiers they rise,
With straining ears and bulging eyes,
While, blinded by fierce calcium rays,
The trembling victim tribute pays
Of song or measure, mime or jest,
To soothe the savage Hydra's breast.
If she please not the monster's whim,
Wild scribes will tear her limb from limb;
Even if charmed, he rend the air
With hideous joy, let her beware;
For she must surely, soon or late,
Fall 'neath the hissing Hydra's hate.



The Hyppogriff

Biologists are prone to sniff
At hybrids like the Hyppogriff.
In evolution's plan, they say,
There is no place for such as they.
A horse with wings could not have more
Than two legs, and this beast had four.
Well, I for one am glad to waive
Two of his legs, his wings to save.
I 'd even sell my auto — if
I had one — for a Hyppogriff.



The Minotaur

No book of monsters is complete
Without the Minotaur of Crete.
Yet should I draw him you would quail,
So in his place I draw a veil.
O stars, that from Creation's birth
Have winked at everything on earth,
Who shine where poets fear to tread,
Relate the story in my stead!

* * * * *

Although it's comforting to know
That Theseus slew him long ago,
We need not boast, we too could do
With — well, a Theseus or two.



